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SUBJECT: PRT LASHKAR GAH: HELMAND IEC READY FOR VOTER REGISTRATION
BUT MATERIALS SLOW TO ARRIVE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Voter Registration is set to begin on January 20 and the local IEC office and Task Force Helmand (TFH) have coordinated efforts to address security and logistical challenges. However, the required registration materials had not yet arrived in Lashkar Gah on January 17 and delays are likely. Governor Mangal has aggressively promoted the registration process during multiple outreach shuras and he encouraged the Provincial Electoral Officer to explain the process to hundreds of Helmand residents. Registration center security remains the biggest challenge and officials worry many residents will not participate in the registration process. Local residents have expressed little interest in registering and many said they are disappointed with the central government.

Helmand IEC Ready

¶2. (SBU) Provincial Electoral Officer (PEO) Engineer Hadi told Governor Mangal, Task Force Helmand (TFH) and Afghan security officials on January 17 that his office is ready to open voter registration (VR) in Helmand Province. He said VR staf have been trained and deployed to Garmsir, awa, Nad Ali, Gereshk, and Musa Qala. Personnel going to Kajaki and Sangin were delayed due to bad weather but are expected to arrive prior to January 20. He said security measures were well coordinated between the Afghan security forces and ISAF has provided excellent support to his office. He said 16 VR sites are ready in eight districts and he believes over 85% of the Helmand population will have access to a registration site. He said further attempts to open VR sites in Naw Zad, Baghran, Vashir, Kanashin and Dishu would be very difficult. IEC headquarters continues to consult with the police and army, as well as local leaders, to determine whether voter registration can begin in these areas.

Registration Materials Required

¶3. (SBU) Hadi told the assembled body that his only remaining concern is the required VR materials have not arrived in Lashkar Gah. He said he is in regular contact with the Kabul IEC office but lacks detailed information, making planning difficult. On January 18, IEC headquarters field staff briefed that materials would move by land to district centers in Helmand that day. Mangal said the IEC and the Afghan security forces must still be ready for the January 20 start date but a small delay is likely unless the materials arrive shortly. He said assistance from TFH will be required to move the VR material to Musa Qala, Sangin and Kajaki and further outreach efforts will be scheduled to build support for the program.

But Will They Register

14. (SBU) The Governor's outreach program has succeeded in informing many Helmand residents that the VR process is set to begin but many say they are unenthusiastic about the process. Residents in Lashkar Gah have attended multiple shuras where the Governor, the Provincial Council, Parliament members and the IEC explained the process and urged participation. Residents told PRTOFF that they have other concerns and registering to vote is not a priority. In Sangin and Kajaki the call to register likewise was met with little enthusiasm; residents are more concerned about improving security. Mangal has worked closely with all the Helmand district governors on the VR planning process and he may have to call on them to build support for VR if the initial effort falls short.

TFH Supports VR Process

15. (SBU) TFH did excellent work planning logistical and security support with the IEC throughout the process. They met regularly with Engineer Hadi and Afghan security officials to review security threats and have in place a security screen around all the VR sites. The security screen will be coordinated from Operational Coordination Centers (OCCs) at both the provincial and district level and Hadi believes he has enough security resources to protect the VR sites. Transport for the district VR staff was arranged well in advance and the Governor conducted VR Shuras in Kajaki, Nad Ali and Sangin and plans to visit Musa Qala and Gereshk to continue promoting the VR process.

COMMENT

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16. (SBU) The Helmand IEC office, TFH and the Afghan Security forces are ready for the VR process and are confident they can handle the security challenges. All are disappointed with the poor coordination with IEC headquarters, as any further delays could push VR further into the poppy eradication time frame. The ANSF is already heavily committed to securing the VR sites and more Afghan security resources may be needed to support VR and poppy eradication.

WOOD